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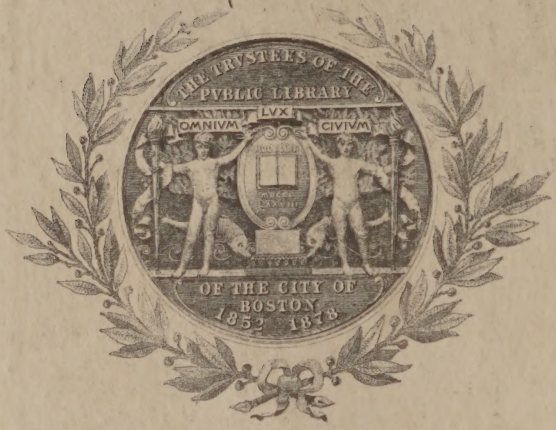
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The Revd Dr. Channing

A

Boston

LETTER,

ADDRESSED TO THE

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CHAIRMAN

OF THE

COMMITTEE OF THE LEGISLATURE

ON THE

LICENSE LAW,

1823

BY HOMO.

BOSTON:

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A LETTER.

"*Drink no longer water*, but use a little *wine* for thy stomach's sake and for thy often infirmities." Timothy, 5 chap. 23d verse.

"And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, and for sheep, or for swine, or for *strong* drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth, and thou shalt eat thereof before the Lord thy God, and shall rejoice, thou and thy household." Deuteronomy, 14 chap.

Mr. Chairman of the Committee of the Legislature on the License Law.

I presume, Sir, the truth of the above quotations, taken from a source we all revere will not be disputed, and as they must prove to all that the use of ardent spirits was permitted both by the Mosaic law, and the New Testament, it is hoped your Committee will permit them to have all due influence in their report. I have heard of a notable house wife, who was so overflown with the Bible she spilt it upon every occasion, and she could not even scold or punish her maids without Scripture. So it is with one half of mankind in the whining canting age in which we live, if you can call Scripture in to support whatever may be advanced however preposterous, they will swallow it.

Though I am no drinker of ardent spirits myself Mr. Chairman, I am fully convinced that when diluted with water, so far from being prejudicial to man they are when *taken in moderation* beneficial in such a severe, variable climate as ours. In this *shocking* opinion I am supported by the best naturalists and philosophers who have written on the relation which exists between the Moral and Physic of man. They maintain that in the northern countries of Europe where the inhabitants make great use of fat oily viands for their subsistence ardent spirist are absolutely neccessary to aid digestion. They do not it is said produce the same effect on the nerves of the mouth and stomach as in more temperate climates. Hence, it appears that it takes double the quantity of ardent spirits to cause intoxication, in St. Petersburg and London that it does in the south of Europe. Spirituous liquors therefore are found beneficial in cold climates. They ought however to be reserved for the working classes who are exposed to the intemperature of the seasons *and be by them used with moderation.*

I heard a gentleman a short time ago railing against the use of ardent spirits, who is in the habit of taking a full allowance of Maderia, Port, or Sherry Wine daily. Now it is a fact that every man who drinks four bottles of these wines drinks one quart of brandy, and where, I would ask, is the difference in drinking brandy in wine or brandy in water.

Being an old man Mr. Chairman, I am subject to rheumatic affections, and nothing contributes more to relieve my sufferings than a warm bath with a quart of New England thrown into it. My wife too, being also somewhat advanced in years, very often washes her stiff limbs in this sovereign cure for many diseases; and as to brandy, if my stomach is in the least disordered from having eaten something that does not agree with it, half a wine glass of it with a little sugar therein is sure to restore

among us. Why do our clergy rail so much against public and private Balls and dancing schools which give suppleness to the limbs, gracefulness to the body, and cheerfulness to the mind? They ought to know that excitement of one sort or other must be sought for as a counterpoise to toil. At present in New England, our people find it only in the conventicle or the grog shop. 'It is to the prevalence of amusements in France, which the tradesman can share with his wife and children, that we are to ascribe the fact that he does not seek amusement alone, and that the innocent attractions' of a bower in a public garden triumphs over the imbruting excesses of a Tavern.

As your Committee Mr .Chairman is said to be well composed, after wading through all the trash on your table, suppose you were to turn your attention to the perusal of some of our modern philosophical works such as Richeraud's Physiology, Cabanis, and that valuable work on health published of late by the celebrated Dr. Thomas John Graham of London. You would find much information on the subject which occupies you and be enabled to *instruct* as well as advise our Legislature what course to pursue on this grand political electioneering question of Grog or no Grog. These authors treat largely on the alimentary regimen of different nations. They prove to you that to the inhabitants of warm climates sobriety is an easy virtue from the nature of their food. Northern nations on the contrary are ravenous from interest and necessity. They swallow enormous quantities of food and prefer those substances which in digestion produce the most heat, hence their voracity and avidity for ardent spirits and fermented liquors. Being obliged to struggle hard against the cold, which tends to benumb the vital powers, to suspend every organic motion, their life is a continued act of resistance to external inflence. Food so acrid, nourishing and healing as theirs, proves plainly the necessity of balancing by a vigorous inward excitement, the debilitating powers that are operating from without. In our New England climate when a man has taken a full meal of animal food while the thermometer ranges from ten above to ten below zero, and he is forced out to attend to his concerns he will find that a glass of Brandy and water is far preferable and more wholesome than cold water. The abuse of spirituous liquors we know is fatal in the burning heat of the W. Indies while the Russians drink them with a sort of impunity and live to an advanced old age amidst excesses which would kill an inhabitant of our more moderate climate. The authors above quoted have proved beyond contradiction that *the drinks best suited to the wants of the animal economy, are those in which the stimulating principles are blended in due proportions of water which holds them in solution.* Almost all the fluids we drink contain a certain portion of nutricious particles, thus, Spanish Wines are in themselves nourishing, and are known to satisfy hunger as well as to allay thirst. This accounts for the preference our full feeding gentlemen give to Brown Sherry, one tumbler of which contains more alcohol than a tumbler of brandy and water. It is a fact Mr. Chairman that man hankers after drinks that will warm his stomach and concoct his food, and as you are to direct what he shall drink and what he shall not give him for your love of the human race something that will dilute his fluids, stimulate his organs, and furnish to the animal economy materials of nutrition, for you may rely on it that when all the functions of the body seem to be indifferently exercised for the want of some gentle stimulus, the

mind also becomes sluggish, inert, and incapable of noble generous action.

The truth is, Mr. Chairman, that our legislature is operated upon from without most powerfully by wild visionary enthusiasts, men who would "swell our souls with their own bigot rage." They are so full of errors and prejudicies that they cannot discern the influence that opinion and Laws have on the morals, manners and happiness of man. "The best means of diminishing says a distinguished writer, the number of those maniacs is to abandon their diseased mind to the mild and gentle regimen of Reason which enlightens infallibly stifling disorders and strengthning virtue." You must tell them in your report Mr. Chairman that this License Law is better suited to the dark ages than to the enlightened one in which we live. The same author which I have quoted above tells us, that they have in Europe one hundred volumes of jurisprudence on Witchcraft and the surest *means* of distinguishing the true from the false. The excommuncation of Grasshoppers so destructive to the harvests was a long time in vogue but these laws and rituals have long since passed away, leaving witches and grasshoppers in peace. The examples of these alienations of the mind so importans in their day were innumerable; others will rise up from time to time and when they have had their effect like the blue laws of Conneticut, the laws to assist and regulate the running and spawning of alewives, down to the license law of our day, will pass into oblivion except when called up now and then for the purpose of laughter and ridicule.

What, let me ask, will posterity think of their forefathers, when they are told that in the year eighteen hundred and thirty nine, a Convention, composed of *soi distant* grave Divines, of learned Physicians and profound Lawyers met in Boston for the purpose of aiding the legislature in *gauging* brother Johnathan's stomach, to know how much Alcohol it would bear. Can any thing be more supremely absurd and disgusting. If the object of all this excitement this nonsense and stuff is to correct the morals of the people *why not act at once with the imposing dignity of statesmen by passing sound and wholesome Laws to punish intemperance and all its concomitant vices*, leaving the stomach to the management of the body that wears it, the best judge of its capacity and power of resistance. But morals are no longer the object of our great Temperance Society. To form a political party which is to govern the state by by throwing its weight in to the scale of that faction whose politics, creeds and dogmas suit them best, is in fact their sole object. *Imperium in imperio* is now their motto. To secure success to their wicked designs against the liberties of the people, they "steep their tongues in honey and cloth their feet with the cunning of a fox" that they may rise to fame and influence. But their race I trust is nearly at an end. The people begin to suspect these designing improvers of the age and the legislature viewing the agitated state of the public mind must be on their guard and act with caution. Should they however shut their ears to the voice of reason and common sense, should they have the hardihood to confirm this license act of their predecessors then the next step will no doubt be in following up their reform to instructions how we shall be *clothed if not fed?*

Like the Russians we may be ordered to wear our hair of a certain cut, or like the Spaniard sport hats of a particular shape; perhaps our males may be ordered like the inhabitants of some of the Swiss cantons, to wear breeches of a certain swell and size instead of pantaloons, and our females like

theirs to wear caps with peculiar borders and petticoats of a length prescribed by law! Such statutes to regulate the fashion of our outside artificial helps are not more unbecoming the dignity of a legislature, than such as prescribe what we shall drink.

You are no doubt aware, Mr. Chairman, that there has lately risen up a new sect among us who from an absurd reading of the Commandment "Thou shalt not kill," renounce the use of animal food. The husks of grain, and bread made of sawdust are among their favorite articles of food, Learned doctors and grave divines, are to be found in the ranks of these mountebanks. The poor stomach complains bitterly of this, its "*sensibilite physique*" cannot support the change and I have no doubt if this License law is confirmed that the Legislature will be called upon before long to prescribe what we shall eat as well as drink and thereby check the rebellious spirit of this fretful carniverous organ "the master of the house."

That your License Law cannot be enforced in the City of Boston our excellent Mayor, the members of the Judiciary and the officers of the police have all declared. It is in fact unjust in its provisions in permitting the rich to purchase fifteen gallons of ardent spirits while it forbids the poor man buying one gill! Unjust principles are baneful. All laws ought to have a uniform bearing on the different classes of society, for unjust Laws invite to insurrection and crime, all those who think themselves oppressed. An aversion to every violation of right is implanted in every man.

It is much to be regretted that our Temperance Society ever abandoned their mild regimen of persuasion and example with which they were so successful in checking the vices of intemperance. All the good and wise began to consider them as the greatest reformers of the age. But now that they are straining to gain a political ascendency by bartering moral for material power the tide of pnblic opinion is settling strong against them.

To conclude, let our Legislature do what they please, those who "*love drink*" as the Indian says, will find means of evading the law. They will club together and purchase the quantity the dealer in spirits is allowed to sell, take it to the house of some friend and there divide it. All that can be done to effect a good purpose is to close all our vile, dirty dram shops, those sinks of iniquity and vice and license in each country town a respectable Tavern or two, making the landlords thereof responsible under bonds for allowing any one to get intoxicated in his house, or to disturb the tranquillity of his neighborhood by vociferous noises or other excesses. Let him also be bound to shut his bar at ten o'clock in the evening and not be suffered to allow ardent spirits to be drank in his house or sold by him for that purpose, until after the hour of noon. By some such regulations as this we might correct that hankering after grog at all hours of the day Law makers, Mr. Chairman, should never indulge in rigorous action for even 'the excess of Reason' Montesquieu says 'is not always desirable, as men almost invaribly prefer the middle to the extreme course." Our Legislature would do well in all contemplated sweeping acts, to remember the fate of that which was passed many years ago forbidding the game of ninepins. As soon as the Legislature rose and the members went to their homes the lovers of this healthful game sat up ten pins which they have continued unmolested to play ever since.

Homo.